

INVESTING IN CHILDHOOD: HEAD START & EARLY HEAD START

Early Childhood Education is Critical

The federally-funded Head Start program provides an important safety net for our nation's most vulnerable children. Head Start and Early Head Start programs reach children living in poverty from birth to age 5 – during the most critical stages of their development. By doing so, these programs give children living in poverty or facing other risk factors opportunities to succeed in school and life that they might never have otherwise.

The early education component of these programs helps children develop socially and emotionally and overcome the large gaps in school preparedness that are linked to family income. Comprehensive social service offerings help entire families improve their situation and better support their youngest members.

But communities where children need these programs sometimes struggle to maintain Head Start programs that meet national standards and retain quality staff. This problem is particularly acute in isolated, rural communities where alternative programs for young children and their families are limited or non-existent.

As a result, the most vulnerable of our nation's children are left without early interventions that could change the course of their entire lives. Ninety percent of brain development occurs by age 5, and the window to lay the foundation for academic and lifelong success is limited. As it closes, young children who lack opportunities for early learning are forever left behind.

Our Unique Perspective

Save the Children's expertise in bringing high-quality early childhood programming to struggling, rural communities uniquely positions us to address this early childhood education challenge. Through our highly successful Early Steps to School Success home visitation program, we have deep experience training local community members to become skilled early educators, and we understand the unique challenges rural children, families and communities face.

Our Early Steps to School Success work has also given us broad experience partnering with local Head Start programs and school districts across rural America. We know what a difference a high-quality Head Start program can make in a community, and we understand the challenges these programs can face in low-



resource, rural communities where local early education capacity is very limited.

Our Solution

Since 2011, Save the Children has applied for and been awarded six grants to lead Head Start programs that had struggled to achieve quality or continuity in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and North Dakota. To provide Head Start children and their families with comprehensive services, we hire only the most qualified staff candidates and then provide weeks of intensive training that incorporates best practices we have successfully employed in similar settings. We refurbish classrooms and playgrounds, transforming them into safe, fun and welcoming environments. We equip our teachers with research-based curriculums and classroom materials that help stimulate young minds and activate little hands and bodies. And we use our innovative and highly-successful home visiting model to invigorate the home-based Early Head Start programs that reach pregnant moms, infants and toddlers.

As one of a few multi-state Head Start providers in the country, we are able to achieve cost savings through scale. We also draw on the rich early childhood expertise of our staff in other locations to conduct ongoing trainings and mentoring. Plus, as a Head Start provider that exclusively focuses on rural America, we are proud to build early childhood capacity in communities that need it most.

Where We Work

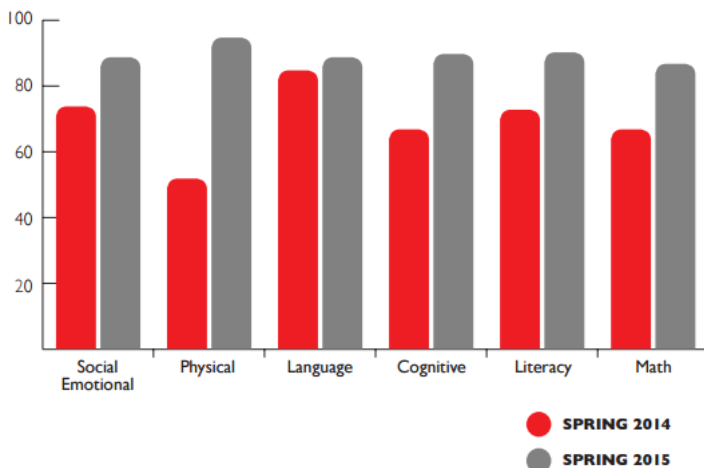
MAIN OFFICE	Counties Served	Program Sites	Children Served	Grant Started	Early Head Start
Forrest City, Arkansas	3	3	80	2011	No
Russellville, Arkansas	9	19	768	2013	Yes
Alexandria, Louisiana	1	9	832	2015	Yes
Jennings, Louisiana	1	2	182	2012	No
Indianola, Mississippi	1	7	538	2014	Yes
Williston, North Dakota	1	1	85	2015	Yes
TOTALS	16	41	2,485		

Our Results

Research has shown that by age 4, children from low-income families are often 18 months behind developmentally. Yet, Save the Children is successfully helping the vast majority of 4-year-olds in our Head Start programs meet developmental expectations.

More Children Reaching Milestones

Percentage of 4-year-olds in Save the Children Head Start programs meeting or exceeding widely-held developmental expectations (Gold Assessment).



Our Theory of Change

When we decided to address challenges affecting young children in rural Head Start communities, we also intended to make an impact for children beyond these specific locations. As we help children succeed, we are tracking the keys to this success. We have begun sharing our learnings with other providers of early education programs in rural America. We also consult with Early Head Start and Head Start programs in California, Mississippi and South Carolina, providing them with training, technical assistance and help developing parent and community engagement strategies.

Save the Children is proud to create pioneering programs that not only give children the best chance for success, but also inspire and achieve lasting impact for underserved children across the country. By transforming children's lives now, we change the course of their future and ours.

